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November 30, 2004

Dear Retail Food Establishment Operator:

Environmental Health Services of the County of Los Angeles, Department of Health Services is launching a lead safety campaign to augment our existing efforts aimed at preventing childhood lead poisoning. The campaign strives to inform consumers and retail food establishment operators about the effects and dangers of lead poisoning in young children.

In the United States, nearly 900,000 children between the ages of 1 and 5 have a blood lead level above the level of concern. Children with lead poisoning are usually asymptomatic; symptoms that do occur are often subtle and mimic other childhood illnesses. Mild lead poisoning can be associated with hyperactivity, irritability, sleeplessness, lack of concentration, behavioral problems, and learning disabilities. More severe lead poisoning may be accompanied by hearing problems, headaches, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, loss of appetite, constipation, muscle soreness, anemia, and neurological impairments such as stumbling, loss of concentration, seizures, encephalopathy, and coma.

Persistent neurological impairment can follow even mild episodes of lead poisoning, and the neurological and developmental consequences of lead poisoning may not be apparent for many years. Therefore, halting continued exposure to lead is the best remedy for most children with elevated blood lead levels.

Prevention of lead hazards is an essential public health goal. As such, our Department continues to identify sources of exposure that may pose a threat to children. Currently, a major concern is exposure through the consumption of candies that contain harmful levels of lead in the candy, the candy wrappers, and/or the clay pots designed to hold the candy.

In light of the potential for lead exposure from suspected candies, we are requesting your cooperation and assistance by voluntarily discontinuing the sale of candies containing lead and the posting lead warning flyers in public areas within your facility that are most visited by

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children and parents. The flyers, provided in English and Spanish, are designed to provide the public with information about contaminated candies, lead hazards, lead testing methods, and contact telephone numbers for additional information.

It is our belief that the posting of warning flyers and the removal for sale of candies that contain lead, will help to improve the lives of your patrons by empowering their ability to make informed food choices, as well as provide businesses an opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to the health of the community.

If you have any questions pertaining to Environmental Health's lead safety campaign, please contact Joe Nash, Director of District Environmental Services at (626) 430-5200.

Thank you for your support of public health.

Very truly yours,

Arturo Aguirre, R.E.H.S., M.A.
Director of Environmental Health

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